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Rating: 4.7

Description: Seeker of truth found Islam as his religion.

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I might not have become a Muslim. I could have been a Hindu, worshipping 14,321 gods and goddesses, such as a goddess for my neighbor's dog, another for the moon, and yet another for Evander Holyfield's lost ear. I would be worshipping all these counterfeit "gods," and I would be sick...sick in the heart and blind to the logic of obeying a pink elephant with six arms, which can be found on the walls of some Hindu-influenced, Indian restaurants! Yes, they worship elephants, which are habitually afraid of mice.

Or perhaps I could be a Christian, worshipping Jesus Christ. But why should I worship a prophet, indeed, who never called himself divine? Wouldn't he know? He does know, and so do I. Jesus is not God and God is not Jesus.

I could have gone to Buddhism, but which sect is correct? Who knows? And would I have wanted to listen to the Dalai Lama telling me how to enjoy life-in his words, "taking three hookers and traveling to Las Vegas."

I did not become any of the above, nor will I. I turned in the direction of Islam when I knew almost nothing of it. One year later, I took Shahada. I only wish I had taken it much earlier. This is my story of becoming a Muslim. It began when I was 10.

One God

When I was 10, my parents enrolled me at the local Conservative Synagogue, in the densely Jewish town of Brookline, Massachusetts. I was sent there supposedly to learn Hebrew and be taught Judaism. I was adequately taught neither. The teachers were mainly Israeli. It is hard for me to remember now, but they actually taught [reformed] Judaism very well. At 10, I sincerely believed in God, read the stories from the Torah and Old Testament, and was more pious than my much older parents. I tried to pray and be steadfast, even though my family and friends, as I remember, did not think of it as even the least important. Why didn't they care? Nevertheless, I kept up my inner Jew. During this time of Judaica, I took peeks at Christianity, wondering how so many of my friends followed this great man, whose name so many people used in vain when

they dropped their papers or tripped. Shouldn't Jesus Christ, I thought, be shown more respect? Moreover, could he be the son of God?

Then one day, still 10, as I went through my readings on the Jews and Israel, I came across a new religion. First, I saw a crescent and star; I read further. I was profoundly moved when I found out that another billion people in the world worshipped the same God as I did. As I think about it now, it was truly remarkable. These followers of Islam, of Allah Almighty read the Qur'an, as it was spelled, and went on a pilgrimage. Interesting!

Unfortunately, further learning at that time was hindered by the affinity for Israel. I was brainwashed about the Muslim terrorists who blew up Jews like dynamite. The Jews were good; the Arabs were bad. That's what my friends told me, that's what my teachers seemed to imply, and I would seldom hear of Islam again until 1999.

Meanwhile, 1994 turned into 1995. My family switched synagogues, and sects. From conservative, we now called ourselves "reform Jews." We became very liberal. Our "Rabbi" was not kosher. He was hardly what I consider a spiritual leader, a man who leads Jews as followers of God. One night, as we sat in the "congregation," our Rabbi tried to keep us awake. He referred to his pleasure of looking lustfully at Boston College "coeds" from his nearby home. He incited only a handful of laughs. Today, as I look back, I remember how he spoke of the "haram" in front of his wife, before the Torah, and in the presence of God. My discontent with Judaism grew, and I knew that a religious move to the right wing was inevitable. Only it wouldn't be Orthodox Judaism.

The Other People of the Book

I was impressed at the time with the Christians' spirituality because it seemed powerful. Judaism, I knew, was a corrupt religion, but I still believed in God. The Christians believe in God, do they not?

I went to mass, I spoke to priests, but I had the world's most difficult time believing that Jesus could be divine. So I forced myself. I would pray to the "son," and what a mess. I tried very hard, but I knew there was no answer. I didn't understand, but I continued studying the Catechism and saying the Lord's Prayer. I wasn't baptized, so I wasn't Catholic. In fact, to become Catholic, you needed to study for nine months. What if I died before I became a Catholic because the priests wouldn't let me become Christian? Then what? I continued to notice flaws in the Christian doctrine. The priests seemed to notice them, but nevertheless they continued preaching.

Around January 26, 1999, I quit the confirmation class. I quit Christianity, although I was not even Christian. I was not "saved," but I did not care. I pleased my parents immensely by leaving the Catholic Church. But, I still knew there was only one God. To this day, I am surprised at how instantly it happened. Not one week after I left the church for good, I was ready to learn about the final religion of God.

The Horrendous Procrastination

My father was overjoyed to learn of my fading interest in Catholicism and he welcomed me with open arms. Unfortunately, he took me to the library. There, I was presented with Encyclopedia Britannica. I read about Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him. The article claimed he slaughtered all the Jewish men of their tribe. Having read this, I was deeply saddened, and I was angry and confused at the same time. I was indignant at having learned that this prophet from Islam had slaughtered Jews, and I was confused about what to do now. I thought I had ruled out Islam, but I still believed in God. Then what? Indeed, I could not go more than a couple of weeks before returning. I knew Judaism was corrupt, I knew Christianity was corrupt. Now I got it: Encyclopedia Britannica is also corrupt.

So I began my search for a local Mosque. In fact, I found a nearby Mosque by accident. I looked on the Internet relentlessly. As soon as I saw the word Boston, I clicked the mouse, awaiting the information that would bring me to worship God in the right way. I waited, patient with a slow and unfeeling modem, and finally, the site had loaded.

At the tap of a mouse button, I was greeted with Assalamu Alaikum. I took down the address, and planned the journey. So special was it to have found a mosque in Boston; I was thrilled that I wouldn't have to travel to Egypt or Jordan or Yemen.

It was around February 28, 1999. I walked down Prospect Street, and I saw the Mosque. I walked to the front, I reached to open the door, and noticed a sign: Women's Entrance. Women's entrance! I didn't know what that meant, so I walked around the mosque, hoping they would let men in somewhere. Suddenly, I felt nervous as I found the men's entrance. I had never met a religious Muslim, and I had no idea what the Muslims' reaction would be upon meeting me. I wondered if I should hide my Jewish identity. I took a breath and entered the door.

"Excuse me," I said to the first man I saw. "I am here to learn about Islam." I waited for his reaction. I waited for an education or to be sent out. Would they really send me out? I had hung up my shoes. The man opened his mouth to speak: "Sorry, I don't speak English," and he went inside the main room. I followed him in. I wasn't sure if he had left me to wander. I looked around, at the faithful prostrating in submission to Allah (swt). I was moved, but I wasn't sure what to do next. Then, I noticed the man returned with what seemed like a horde of faithful others. I sat down. There was one of me and what seemed like 50 of them. They all spoke to me at the same time. It was overwhelming, but it felt great. It showed how important Islam was to Muslims then and there. I was given "A Brief Illustrated Guide to Islam," and within minutes, I had the Shahada before my eyes. There it was: La Ilaha Illa Allah, Muhammadun Rassoolu Allah. I was ready to say it. Here and now. Nine months to become a Catholic, probably more to be a Jew. In a matter of moments, I could embrace Islam.

“Are you sure? You don’t have to do this,” came the advice of a friendly but cautious brother. I was surprised: was it such a big thing that I would have to think about it? Should I not become a Muslim now?

That day, I did not become a Muslim. But it was a wonderful Saturday. I met brothers from all over the world. And yet, as diverse as the people appeared, they all shared a common objective, which was clear: the utmost submission to Allah (swt).

It would be over a year before I would become a Muslim. During that year, I had been at the site of an alleged shooting in the Bronx, passing through in my family’s car. In fact, the bullet shattered the rear window, just a few feet away from my head. I survived without a scratch, and soon forgot about the whole incident.

On May 6, 2000, I took the same train I had always taken to the Masjid in Cambridge. This time, I brought with me a book on Arabic, as I thought it would be appropriate to learn the language. That was my philosophy back then. Study Islam comprehensively. By the time you take Shahada, you’ll be a genius. I ran into a Muslim I hadn’t seen in months. He asked me if I had become a Muslim yet. Then, we had a short conversation. He talked about how if I went out in the street and got in a car accident, I would die a non-Muslim. This very well could mean hellfire. He told me this exact story back in December 1999, but I had dismissed it, even in the wake of the Bronx shooting. This time, putting off Islam would not last.

At the Masjid that same afternoon, I sat down and watched as the Muslims lined up for Dhuhr, the second prayer of the day. I stared as they prostrated, an act Shaitan had refused. And I couldn’t take it any longer. I wondered what it would be like to become a Muslim now, but my thoughts were all one-sided. I told the brother right after the prayer that I wanted to become a Muslim today. As I write this, three months later, I know that taking Shahada was the best thing I could ever have done. I only wish I could have done it earlier.

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